MMOZine

ISSUE 43 | OCTOBER 2012

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EXTENSIVE HANDS-ON!

LORD OF THE RINGS: RIDERS OF ROHAN

GHOST RECON ONLINE

TRANSFORMERS UNIVERSE

GLITCH

END OF NATIONS

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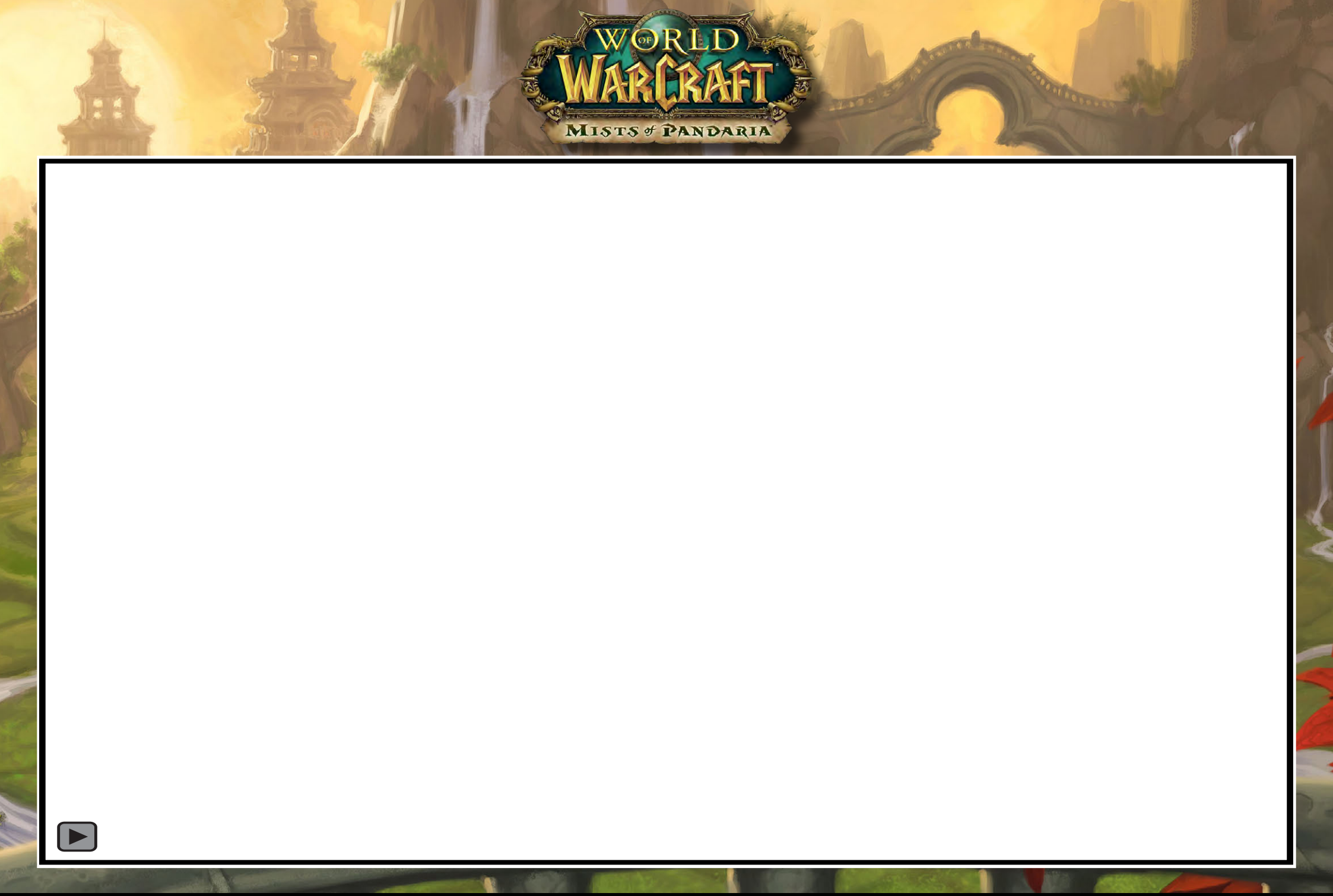

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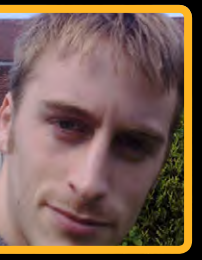

I hate the term 'online', I really do. If any MMO maker out there is currently stewing over whether to add the ridiculous moniker to their particular wares do the world the favour and don't. Seriously, just don't.

This month three out of the five games that we've cover all have 'online' in the title and frankly it's just sickening. It's like adding 'The Video Game' to the name of whatever tripe you're trying to peddle. Turbine we'll forgive you with *LOTRO*, as MMORPGs were still a relatively new phenomenon when you arrived on the scene, but Ubisoft what the heck were you thinking with *Ghost Recon Online*. Surely haven't all of the games in that shooter series boasted an component using the interweb at this point? Why chuck that redundant terminology in there? Is it for the benefit of Google? public understanding?

If you have any crazy conspiracy theories about this or think we're coming down with a hefty dose of grammar madness then please let us know at GamerZines.com. We won't bite, honest.

Andy Griffiths, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

Don't miss! *This month's highlights!*

QUICK FINDER

Transformers Universe
End of Nations
Glitch
Ghost Recon Online
City of Heroes
Lord of the Rings Online: Riders of Rohan
Star Wars: The Old Republic

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www.cranberrypublishing.com
Publishing Director: Dave Taylor
Email: dave.taylor@cranberrypublishing.com
Editorial Director: Dan Hutchinson
Email: dan.hutchinson@cranberrypublishing.com
Commercial Director: Duncan Ferguson
Email: duncan.ferguson@cranberrypublishing.com
Telephone: 0117 986 6550
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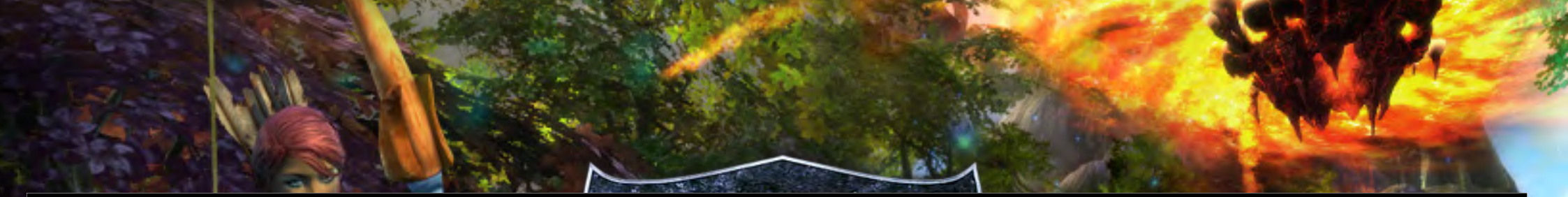

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TRANSFORMERS UNIVERSE

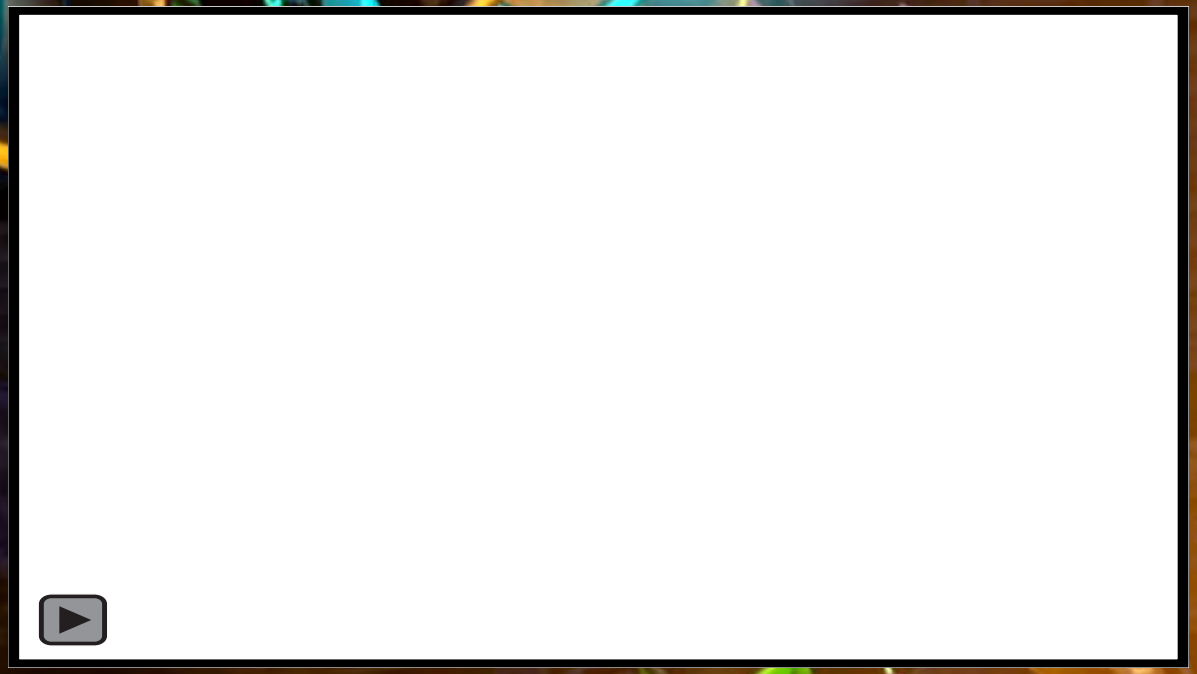
PUB: JAGEX
DEV: IN-HOUSE
ETA: 2013

FIRST LOOK

ONE TO WATCH!

"Browser game, roll out!"

Unlike Michael Bay's cinematic abortions, the *Transformers* license has fared quite well when it comes to videogames. High Moon Studios is currently flying the single-player flag with their Cybertron series and in the future Jagex will join the fold, with what appears to be an free-to-play arena game starring the likes of Megatron and Optimus Prime, with players able to enroll in the ranks of either the Decepticons or the Autobots in a war that's taking place on Earth. That's all we know at this point, unfortunately. However a gameplay trailer, recently revealed at New York Comic Con has shown more, and if nothing else *Transformers Universe* does look rather pretty and very fast paced – especially for a browser game. ■



So what actually do we know?

Jagex announced that they had acquired a license from Hasbro to make an MMO based in the Transformers universe in June 2011, but we suspect the free-to-play game was in development months before that. *Transformers Universe* utilises a more advanced version of the *RuneScape* engine and will feature known characters in the cannon, in addition to oodles of character customisation options.

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INCOMING

HOT NEWS FROM THE MMO WORLD!

CLICK EACH GAME FOR MORE INFO

GUILD WARS 2

PUB: NCSOFT
DEV: ARENANET

OUT NOW

Few MMORPGs emulate Halloween as well as the original *Guild Wars*. Costumes, fireworks, special sweets, transmogrifying tonics and quests are all part and parcel of that game's events, with Mad King Thorn presiding over the festivities. It's no wonder then that ArenaNet are looking to follow a similar template for the sequel, with new items available via the in-game store and curiously paid PvP tournaments which require pay out substantially better prizes and gear to the victors.

Will it be a patch on the original's celebration of the year's spookiest holiday?

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The Save CoH in-game rallies have attracted massive support.

CITY OF HEROES: THE HERO PARAGON CITY NEEDS INTERVIEW

PUB: NCSOFT
DEV: PARAGON STUDIOS
DUE TO BE CLOSED: 30th NOVEMBER

We talk to TonyV, head of the Save CoH movement...

BIO

Tony Vazquez, otherwise known as TonyV, has been a key member of the *City of Heroes* community for years as admin of the fan site alliance, Titan Network. By day he works as a mild-mannered shift manager at a data centre, but at night he's fighting hard to ensure *City of Heroes* stays online via various community events and charity drives.

MMO closures are an inevitable part of the hobby we love, yet sometimes decisions are made that defy understanding and expectation, and the impending closure of *City of Heroes* comes under that heading.

November 30th will be the last day the esteemed MMORPG will be in service, yet thousands of players worldwide are currently doing their bit to try and save Paragon City from liquidation with community drives, letters to CEOs, and charitable donations in order to show the world that this community is still thriving. Despite a petition boasting over 20,000 signatures declaring support, still NCsoft refuse to give *City of Heroes* a second chance.

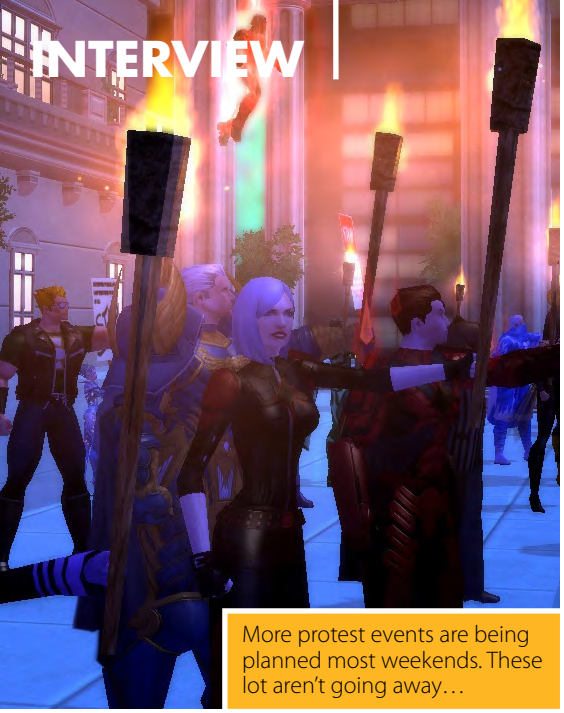
This story of a community galvanising itself was one *MMOZine* felt it had to cover. Not only because this game from 2004 deserves better, but also because this is a topic that will touch every MMO player at some time or another. Will your favourite game of choice be the next to go? Perhaps, or perhaps not, but it's up to you how your favourite game goes – either with a whimper or a whoop whoop.

We caught up with the so-called head of the Save City of Heroes movement, TonyV to ask him exactly how the good fight is going…

How did you find yourself in charge of the Save Paragon City movement?

I don't know really! It just kind of happened. I hesitate to use the words 'in charge' as I'm not really in charge of it. We kind of had the infrastructure ahead of time which is probably why it sort of fell on the Titan network. There are other fansites out there don't get me wrong, but we had a pretty big following already with the Paragon wiki, city info tracker, sentinel utility and some of our forums. Of all the non-official sites, we were arguably the most familiar to people who were already playing. Plus I guess I took the initiative on the Saturday after they announced the *City of Heroes'* closure. They announced the shutdown on Friday August 31st, and on the Saturday I put a post on the forum trying to feel out how much people would be interested in trying to save *City of Heroes*. I might have jumped in a little bit earlier than some other folks as well, so I think that's sort of how I get to be, like I say I hate to use the term 'in charge', but maybe one of the more visible members who have been trying to save *City of Heroes*.

I think what has been really notable about the whole movement is just how positive it has been since the announcement, with regards to in-game events, charity drives etc.



More protest events are being planned most weekends. These lot aren't going away…

> **"THEY HAD NO IDEA THERE WOULD BE THAT LARGE A MOVEMENT TO SAVE CITY OF HEROES"**

CoH has some of the most varied and most enjoyable traversal powers of any MMO.

How difficult has that been?
It hasn't been too hard, but lately it has gotten harder since NCsoft posted a message saying that all efforts had been exhausted [to keep the game open]. I don't know how to say this nicely, but I don't think they tried hard enough. On August 31st they announced the closure, they laid off everyone at Paragon Studios and it took me a day to wrap my brain around the scope of what they'd said. Once I found out the scope of what had happened, it hit me that the odds were stacked against us, because who has ever shut down a game, a studio and laid off everybody and come back from that?

The following week I heard that some of the leadership at Paragon Studios were in talks with NCsoft about acquiring the IP rights, and I had heard from the grapevine that our efforts led to a lot of that. They had no idea there would be that large of a movement to save *City of Heroes*. It has sort of been a rollercoaster. On August 31st everybody thought this was impossible, but over the weekend people kind of got a little excited, as we thought we could save it. We had a unity rally, special events and another projects going on. It turned from 'this is impossible' to 'this could actually happen!' So I look at the announcement they made previously the same way. They said they had exhausted all options to keep *City of Heroes* open, but you know we thought that they had exhausted all options on August 31st, yet we still saw some daylight and a possibility opened.

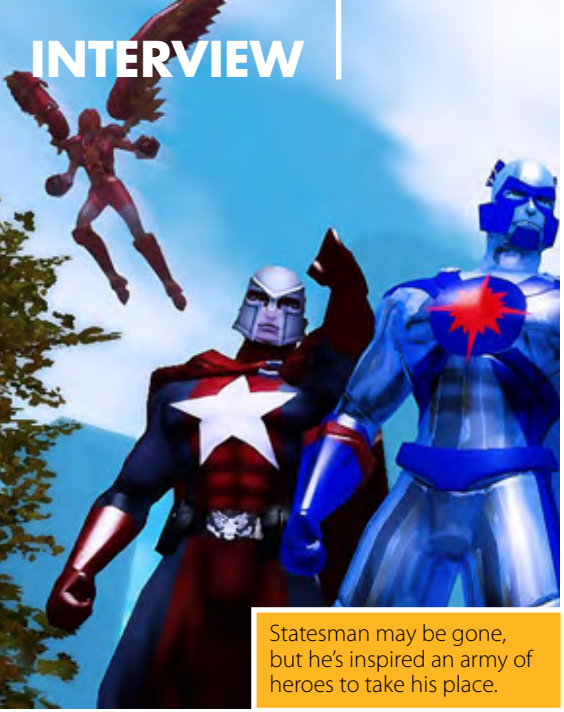
Announcing that an MMO is closing is immensely disappointing for all involved, but do you think there was anything NCsoft could've done to make that blow less painful?
Deep inside everyone acknowledges that a game can't go on forever – 100 years from now people aren't going to be still playing *City of Heroes*! The thing that caught us off-guard and made *City of Heroes* different was that the game was doing well. Paragon Studios was not only making enough money off of *City of Heroes* to support the salaries and benefits of those running the game, but they actually had a second development team working on another project. I'm sure money was being sent back to the corporate office, that's the point of having a subsidiary. In that sense, we were really caught off guard.

We had a new issue release ready to go probably a week or two out. Paragon Studios had new issues planned well into next year, probably longer than that. The Paragon store was going great, they were constantly introducing new items, costume packs and holiday events were being planned.

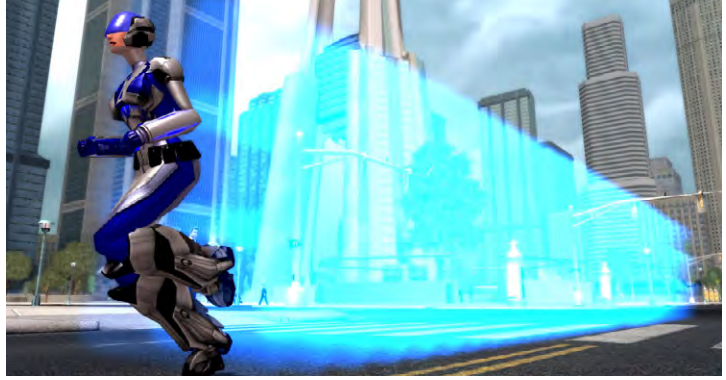
I don't know if there's a good way to shut an MMO, but I do think there are signs that an MMO needs to be shut down – players losing interest, not being financially viable, developers losing interest, all of those I think are pretty good signs that your MMO is just about to go, but we had none of those signs. In this case their statement basically said that it was a corporate decision. I guess there are good reasons to kill off an MMO and there are bad ones, and I think that's a bad reason to kill off *CoH* completely. It's not a bad reason to disassociate yourself with it, that's why we've been really pushing for 'Hey we understand it's a business decision. You want to focus your efforts on other areas, so let somebody else have the game'.

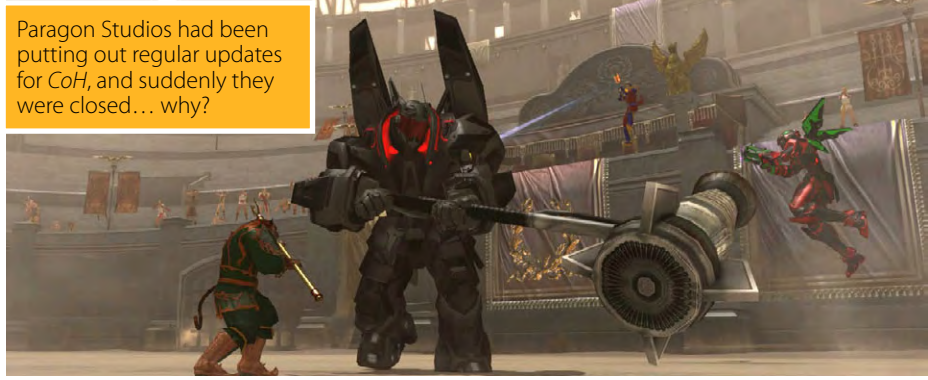
Make it available to sell, but not at an incredibly high price-tag that nobody is going to go for, or with strings attached

City of Heroes first went live in 2008 and in many fans' opinions, there was plenty of life still in it.



Statesman may be gone, but he's inspired an army of heroes to take his place.





Paragon Studios had been putting out regular updates for *CoH*, and suddenly they were closed… why?

that nobody can possibly fulfil.

Have you reached out to any other MMO publishers regarding *City of Heroes'* acquisition? Have you handed over any data regarding Titan Network or anything like that?
Some people in our community have reached out to some other publishers like Valve and Riot Games. Some of them have even reached out to Cryptic as they originally developed *City of Heroes*. Nobody has publicly expressed interest.

I hate to be coy about this, but I have heard that multiple publishers and developers have been interested in enquiring about *City of Heroes*, it isn't just Paragon Studios at the table. Who? I can't really say, but if there are they don't talk to me directly. The more the merrier though, as the higher the number the better chance we have of another studio acquiring it.

The idea of the community owning the game they love is an enticing one. Have you considered crowd-sourcing or anything like that to buy *City of Heroes*?
We have and NCsoft has not acknowledged it. I have tried to communicate to them that it's something that we would be interested in, but they have not responded. Here in the US we have an American football team called The Green Bay Packers who are actually owned by their fans. This was one of the examples I used early on with the crowdfunding effort.

The community of Green Bay actually owns the Packers and one of the appealing things with that is that you know the Packers are never going to move out of Green Bay and they'll never shut down as long as the community supports them. This is certainly an appealing option I'd like to explore, it's something I've directly contacted Ncsoft about, but they haven't responded.

Have you considered Kickstarter at all? I'd certainly be willing to fork out $100 to finance *City of Heroes* or an MMO of that ilk.
Possibly so, but it's still a little premature. There are two reasons for that, one I still want to get a feeling of what the former staff members of Paragon Studios have in mind. I don't think they've ruled out the possibility of forming a new studio.

I know a lot of developers are getting jobs and there's always the danger that it won't happen just because of attrition. However most of the people at Paragon Studios are either under contract or severance agreements, so they can't come out and say what their plans are. One of the things I'd like to do before they go too far out on their own is to see what their intentions are.

To see what Matt Miller, Melissa Bianco, Brock Clayton, Ross Boredon, Sean McCann end up doing and where they're at in a few months. If they are all still out there and haven't gone to work at another company, that would indicate to me that they are planning to get back together and form a new studio. If they do and want to develop a new game, I would be really hard pressed not to give them my full support as they have a proven track record. Not only can they get the job done, they can make it really fun and it can be self-sustaining. And of course there is the not insignificant fact that we like them. They are nice people, they are really giving people and interactive with the community.

For whatever reason if that doesn't work out, I'd absolutely like to chase down Project Sunset and see if we as a community could develop a new game. If we do that, obviously we'd have a lot of responsibilities.

I know a lot of people are anxious to get a kickstarter project out there and get the ball rolling, but I just want to make sure we have all our ducks in a row. We need a firm business plan in place, goals and milestones, and a team put together that I'd feel reasonably confident that they could actually pull it off. If we get all of that lined up, absolutely I'd be more than willing to start a kickstarter project. ■

To find out how you can help to save City of Heroes, check out the Titan Network.

> ***"MULTIPLE DEVELOPERS AND PUBLISHERS HAVE BEEN INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING CITY OF HEROES"***

TO READ MORE OF THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW ONLINE CLICK HERE

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LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: RIDERS OF ROHAN

HANDS-ON

PUB: WARNER BROS.
DEV: TURBINE INC.
LAST GAME: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE
ETA: OUT NOW

TWITTER

@lotro
Did you know you'll be able to spar on Horseback? Find out more in the Mounted Combat Dev Diary! http://ow.ly/e2TB7

@tatsuo6281
I think about to cancel my wow account. There are so many good f2p games like gw2 and swtor or lotro.

@chiemps
Now is the hour, Riders of Rohan, oaths you have taken! Fulfill them all! To Lord and Land!

@rickheaton
Current Riders of Rohan release note word count: 7,130! #sore-fingers #LOTRO #editinglikea-madman

@sera_brennan
Listening to The Riders of Rohan soundtrack. I've heard it a lot and it's still not old. http://spoti.fi/OQGEez

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More than horses for courses

It's very rare, but occasionally developers allow us humble journalist folk to take GM accounts for a quick spin. Just think of it… infinite in-game gold, the ability to purchase anything from the cash store on a whim, instant teleportation to areas of the world you aren't even supposed to go and our personal favourite, the magic command to kill even the mightiest bosses in a few key strokes. I have indeed tasted the sublime admin nectar boys and girls and it was as sweet as I always imagined. Boasting aside, the reason we bring this up is that like GM powers, the promise of being part of a living, breathing recreation of Middle-earth is something millions of gamers from around the globe have craved for since *LOTRO* launched in 2007.

Since those illustrious days of big budget MMO triumphs, Turbine has been carefully laying the groundwork to give players the kind of pay-off that they crave, painstakingly recreating the Mines of Moria, Mirkwood and even parts of Isengard itself, but now the subscription turned free-to-play MMORPG is tackling that moment in Tolkien's fiction when Sean Be… sorry Boromir tries to take the ring from Frodo and the fellowship falls into disarray. As jumping off points go, this certainly is a great one, but Turbine aren't relying solely on the story hooks to get players involved, instead they've recreated Eastern Rohan implementing an extraordinary level of detail, including a selection of the most beautiful mead halls you'll ever see, and they've finally added mounted combat to appease the masses.

DON'T TELL THE ELF

In geographical terms alone, *Riders of Rohan* features an area twice as big as *Mines of Moria*, and it shows, as the wide open green flat spaces of the titular province allow lots of room

Galloping around without a care in the world, not counting the death and destruction around Rohan of course… we mustn't forget that now.

Those are burnt corpses around Eomer's feet. Yep, he's still a bad ass.

for players to clippity clop around at their leisure, occasionally taking out any warbands they come across. Any attacks on horseback are queued so that as soon as targets come into range, they fire off. This is to eliminate misses due to player error.

That accessibility angle also extends to item harvesting, as any loot accumulated during mounted combat is automatically stored in a separate bag in the UI, meaning you don't have to swing back and pick anything up.

It isn't all cake and ice cream though, as initially the new momentum system takes some getting used to, with attacks carried out at an all-out gallop causing more damage than those at a canter, but steeds actually feel as though they have some weight and are fully customisable from head to tail with gear both earned and purchasable from the in-game store. The most expensive of which is the Reveller's Gilded Bundle which comes in at an eye-watering 3,495 gold points (around $28.99) and comes with an especially fast horsey with lots of HP and gear, but there are cheaper options, so don't think Turbine are going all Bethesda on us.

Any equine enthusiasts will find that the horse animations are very convincing, and overall it's just fun to see a part of Middle-earth which is quite pleasant. Like when we first stepped into The Shire only with acres of open spaces, rolling hills and subtly moving blue skies. Sure the roaming warbands of Saruman and Mordor are razing villages, marked by telltale smoke plumes which can be easily spotted in the distance, but that doesn't make this expansion seem anywhere near as depressing as *Mines of Moria*, or worse yet *Siege of Mirkwood*.

> *"It's just fun to see a part of Middle-earth which is quite pleasant"*

The design aesthetic is certainly the reason for that, but that doesn't mean you aren't seeing really important things in the Epic Story. Key locations like Argonath, Fangorn Forest, Amon Hen and the seats of seeing and hearing all help to add gravitas to player adventures, and even as a passing fan of Tolkien's fiction, I did feel the hairs slightly rise on my neck as I visited these places.

What is this? Some kind of horsey fashion parade?

Turbine have outdone themselves when it comes to designing inside environments this time around.

It's odd to say but these areas have a presence to them which is rarely felt in MMOs.

Turbine has also had a lot of fun with quest design too, with players tasked with tracking down Merry and Pippin in a instanced Epic Quest by tracking footprints and the like, *CSI Miami* this ain't, and a phased area where you restore a village so it's fit for purpose after a devastating Orc attack. These are just a couple of highlights of the new quests available to players, and there are dozens more.

Couple all of this new content with beautifully designed mead halls which will surely become new social hubs in the future and an increased level cap up to 85, and *Riders of Rohan* is the kind of expansion that offers content for every kind of player – be they story hound, or beer-loving socialite.

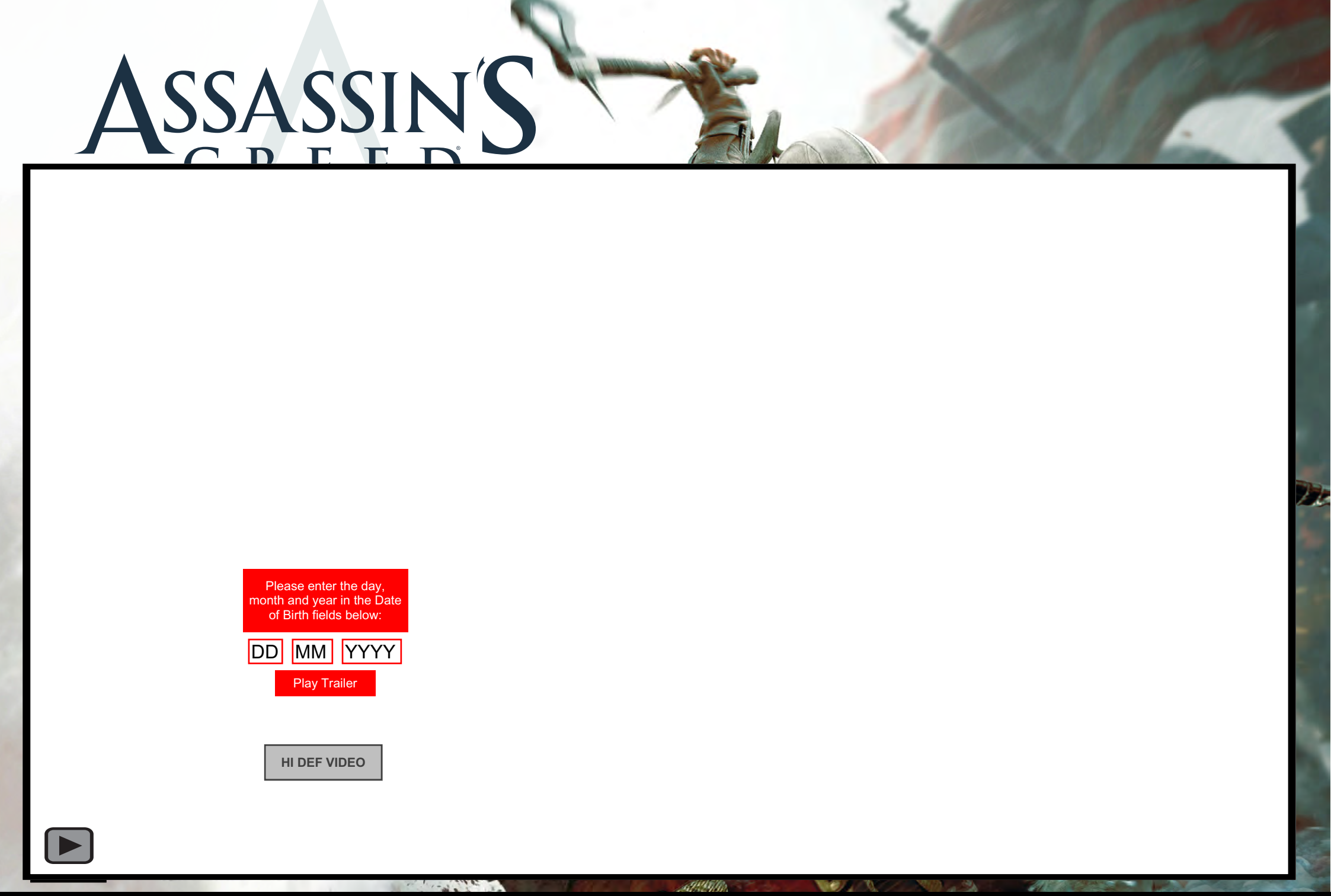
That's probably why Turbine are charging so much for this hefty slice of content ($39.99 with a host of bonuses), but then in our opinion there's enough new gameplay, quests and world to explore to validate the asking price.

> *"Riders of Rohan gave us the thirst to jump back in and continue our adventures again"*

So the big question is, did *Riders of Rohan* meet my substantial expectations? The answer is a resounding yes. If anything, stepping back into Middle-earth, (if only for a guided tour) made me realise how much I've neglected my character in *Lord of the Rings Online* and *Riders of Rohan* gave me the thirst to jump back in and continue my adventures again.

It's a shame I'll have to jump through a lot of hoops culminating in hundreds of hours, to get to a point where my character would even be eligible to ride around on a War Steed and take out roaming bands of enemies, but the calling of the rolling green hills just might make that substantial effort worthwhile. Who said it's the journey not the destination, eh? ■

"Mr Wormtongue we presume?"



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END OF NATIONS
HANDS-ON

PUB: TRION WORLDS
DEV: PETROGLYPH GAMES
LAST GAME:
RISE OF THE IMMORTALS
ETA: END OF 2012

QUICK QUOTES

"Bringing a dozen or so units into battle means that you don't feel like a brave commander turning the tide of war, instead you just feel like another cog in the machine."

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

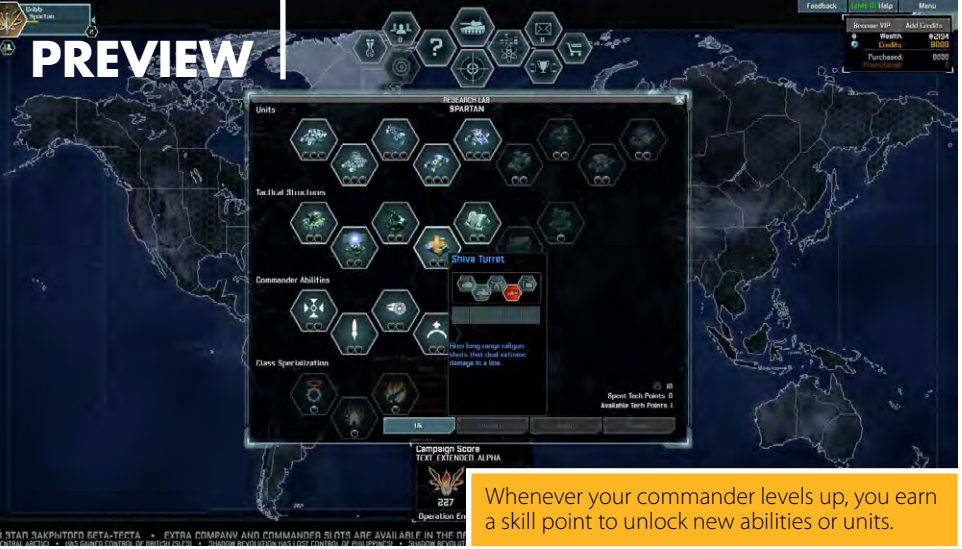
Welcoming the RTS into the MMO fold

We've had a lot of arguments about whether *End of Nations* is in fact an MMO. Sure it's free-to-play, has more microtransactions you can shake a stick at, a defined class system and gameplay which praises multiplayer action over any other, but something feels a little off, like there's something lacking to tie it all together.

We spent an entire weekend playing the alleged MMORTS during the game's fourth Beta event, and even though it was clear the game has come on leaps and bounds since we last wrote about it, we came away a bit bemused about what the developers are actually trying to do.

When you first sign up you're greeted with choosing one of two different factions: the Liberation Front and the Shadow Revolution. Think *Command & Conquer's* GDI versus NOD and you aren't fair off from understanding these two opposing forces, but there's also the entirely AI-controlled Order of Nations also chucked in, who are a mysterious entity who have been declared rulers of a futuristic version of our world, albeit after a host of social disasters. From there you select a class for your created Commander, either Patriot or Spartan for the Liberation Front and Wraith or Phantom for Shadow Revolution, and you're let loose into the multiplayer marshlands.

Other than the occasional glossy cut-scene, there's very little exposition to actually communicate the nature of this universe. There's a very useful tutorial which introduces the skills associated with assaulting enemy bases, maintaining control points and even base level control stuff, like swinging the camera around your units, ordering them around and casting out their special ability, but it's clear that *End of Nations* lacks structure. The world map basically functions as the main hub, where you can speak to other players, see which territories have



Whenever your commander levels up, you earn a skill point to unlock new abilities or units.

Players can bring multiple companies into battle, but only one can be deployed at any time.

Certain capture points are lined with traps, like this timed exhaust vent which throws out fire at regular intervals.

fallen into whose hands, and queue up for multiplayer matches ranging from regular 1vs1 to 28 vs28, but it all feels a bit shallow, like something you'd expect from a free-to-play game in 2009, not 2012.

End of Nations utilises a very stringent unit cap, which means that players can only usually bring

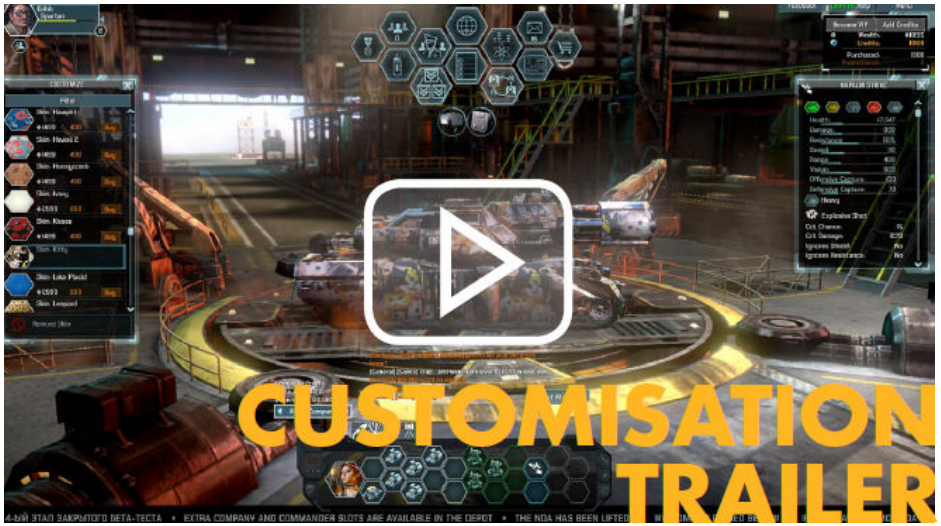
> *"The gameplay is exactly what you'd expect of an RTS"*

in a dozen or so units into battle, depending on strength, supply cost, energy etc. These decks of units, or companies, can be kitted out and switched out during combat allowing you some flexibility, but there isn't any base building or anything of that ilk.

As you level up your Commander the cap does increase, but this limits the competitive strategy of the game, as you know that if you go against a higher-level Commander than yourself he's going to steam-roll you every time. That emphasis on level gauging is certainly MMO-like, with matches offering up XP and credits in accordance with performance., but it doesn't feel right for a competitive RTS.

The gameplay on the other hand is exactly what you'd expect of an RTS with support powers like napalm drops and mini-nukes helping to vary up the unit ordering fun. All the PvP maps tend to involve capture points, with teams fighting to keep control of a few key points on a map –and PvE missions tend to be much more varied, one of which involved taking down a giant doomsday cannon and another featured fleeing from a four-legged walker laying waste to a densely populated town.

These missions were all introduced with detailed briefings



Battles are a constant rock, paper, scissors-style balancing act between nimble, slow, air and ground units.

Do you think that tank operator is compensating for something?

and starred characters which we had no context for, yet they still proved entertaining and surprisingly well-produced for a free-to-play game.

PAY UP OR SHUT UP

What you will have to pay for in *End of Nations* are mods for your chosen units to increase their power and potency, skins and hero units. All of these can be bought with real cash, or credits earned in-game, but seeing as each unit has slots for two mods – you'll find yourself constantly looking at the stats screen to see how to boost your spec in exactly the right way.

All of this tweaking is done in the entirely separate Armoury screen, where you can look at units up close, fiddle with their appearance and gauge exactly how much damage they'll do in the battlefield, and looking at these creations up close does give you an appreciation of the Petroglyph's unit design, especially the mechanised bi-pedal walkers. Pricing of these microtransactions will be crucial, as there seems to be a lot of items which are essential when it comes to army progression, which means it's going to be difficult for Petroglyph to avoid making players feel like they're being nickled and dimed whenever they specialise a unit's attack specification.

> *"There's still a slither of time for Petroglyph to add more features to their game"*

The concept behind *End of Nations* is a great one, but the emphasis on team play and bringing a dozen or so units into battle means that you don't feel like a brave Commander turning the tide of war, instead you just feel like another cog in the machine. There's a disconnect with other players, even on your own team, so during battles you aren't entirely sure which way supremacy is swaying. Sure there's chat and teamspeak for that, but that doesn't excuse the rudamentary interface which currently just consists of adding friends, and joining battles.

End of Nations is due to launch later this year, so there's still a slither of time for Petroglyph to add more features to their game, and make the universe tie together a bit more succinctly. Here's hoping they do as there is a good experience here, it just needs to be brought out into the open a little more. ■

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Your house has its own customisable butler to help liaise with other players.

GLITCH HANDS-ON

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS

PUB: TINY SPECK
DEV: IN-HOUSE
LAST GAME: N/A
ETA: CURRENTLY IN OPEN BETA

Crafting your own destiny

Sandbox experiences aren't really my thing. I like structure, clearly defined goals and a universe that panders to my every whim rather than existing blissfully without my influence. That is perhaps why a lot of social MMOs like *Glitch* have passed me by, as existing for the point of existing has never really held much sway with me – unless that game is *Animal Crossing*, obviously.

Nintendo's humble good-natured life sim is a world away from most MMO releases with an atmosphere which is less about the constant need to progress and more about tending to a world and making a slice of it your own. The reason why we bring this assuredly offline experience up is that *Glitch* takes every part of that legendary series and successfully ports it into an browser-based MMO environment with dozens of different skills to learn, housing which is fully customisable and lots of intriguing characters to interact with.

If you take a look at the visuals and listen to the delightfully plinky plonky soundtrack, it would be easy to dismiss *Glitch* as a kid-orientated experience, but this is world that all ages can revel in. Like all great free-to-play experiences, it's a doddle to get into this game. You simply head to the game's website, create a character and you begin playing straight away. The user interface slings a few introductory quests your way, establishing the elaborate skill system which forces your character to learn skills in real-time, and how you can interact with the host of wildlife, characters, vendors and other players which occupy the rest of the side-scrolling world.

The speech bubbled dialogue is strange yet endearing and the activities, be they milking butterflies or petting a pig so you can nibble on its meat, make the most of the slightly obtuse world. There are plenty of areas to visit in the overworld,

Glitch's four different islands contain plenty of secrets.

TWITTER

@softiesbyvacay
On my mini vacay I've been playing Glitch. It's a browser-based MMO that is sooo cute!

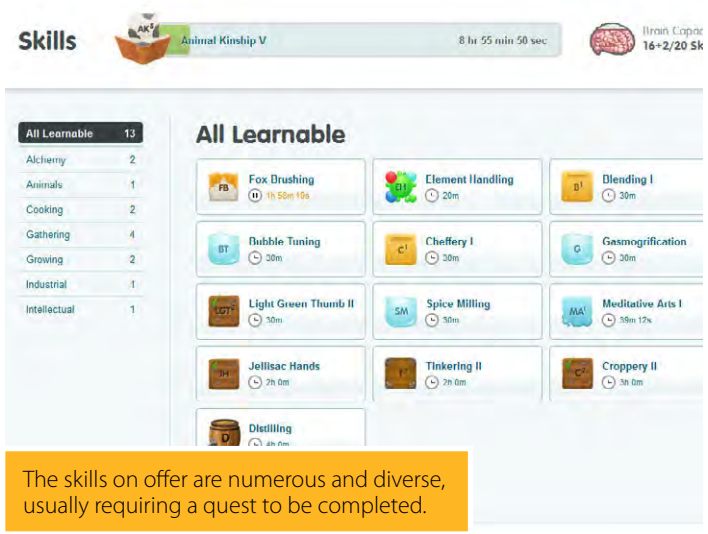
@hoopleton
One #Glitch's journey through joyful, blissful chaos. Glitch Journal: http://hoopleton.com/glitch-journal/ @playglitch

@playglitch
Do you like Glitch? Well now, we will like you back for liking us, to the tune of 25 credits.

@notoriousjwc
Random Smothers Brothers references – just another reason why I love @playglitch

TWEET US @GAMERZINES

The interactive fables are the closest *Glitch* has to a story.



The skills on offer are numerous and diverse, usually requiring a quest to be completed.

but gameplay rarely veers from the traditions of platforming and harvesting items from flora and fauna. There are gods which need tribute, and they'll offer up a nifty imagination bonus (*Glitch*'s term for XP) for any goods you sling down their statues' throats, but for the most part this is a very crafting-orientated experience.

Occasionally quests will chuck interesting stories, platforming challenges and neat little fables your way, and that's when the character of *Glitch* really shines through. Being told about a god stealing stars by interacting with slowly fading storyboards is much more fun than it sounds.

GETTING HOOKED UP

A lot of this social experience's appeal is linked with developing your house and producing items which can then be sold. Turning your persistent pad into a farm with vegetables and livestock takes time, but other players can visit it any time, regardless of you being online or not, and growing your character to be able to interact and do more things in the over-world soon becomes a worrying obsession.

Coming across another player is rare in the world, but the local and general chat channel is there for you if want to team up with others, tackle quests together or just meet up in the world to high-five, hug or trade.

> *"I didn't expect a social experience to get its hooks into me this quickly or deeply"*

Playing an MMORPG without any combat may sound like chowing down on a burger only to find there's no meat between the buns, but *Glitch* doesn't suffer from that kind of disappointment. Crafting completely replaces that compulsive itch and results in a community which is much more upbeat and ready to help players.

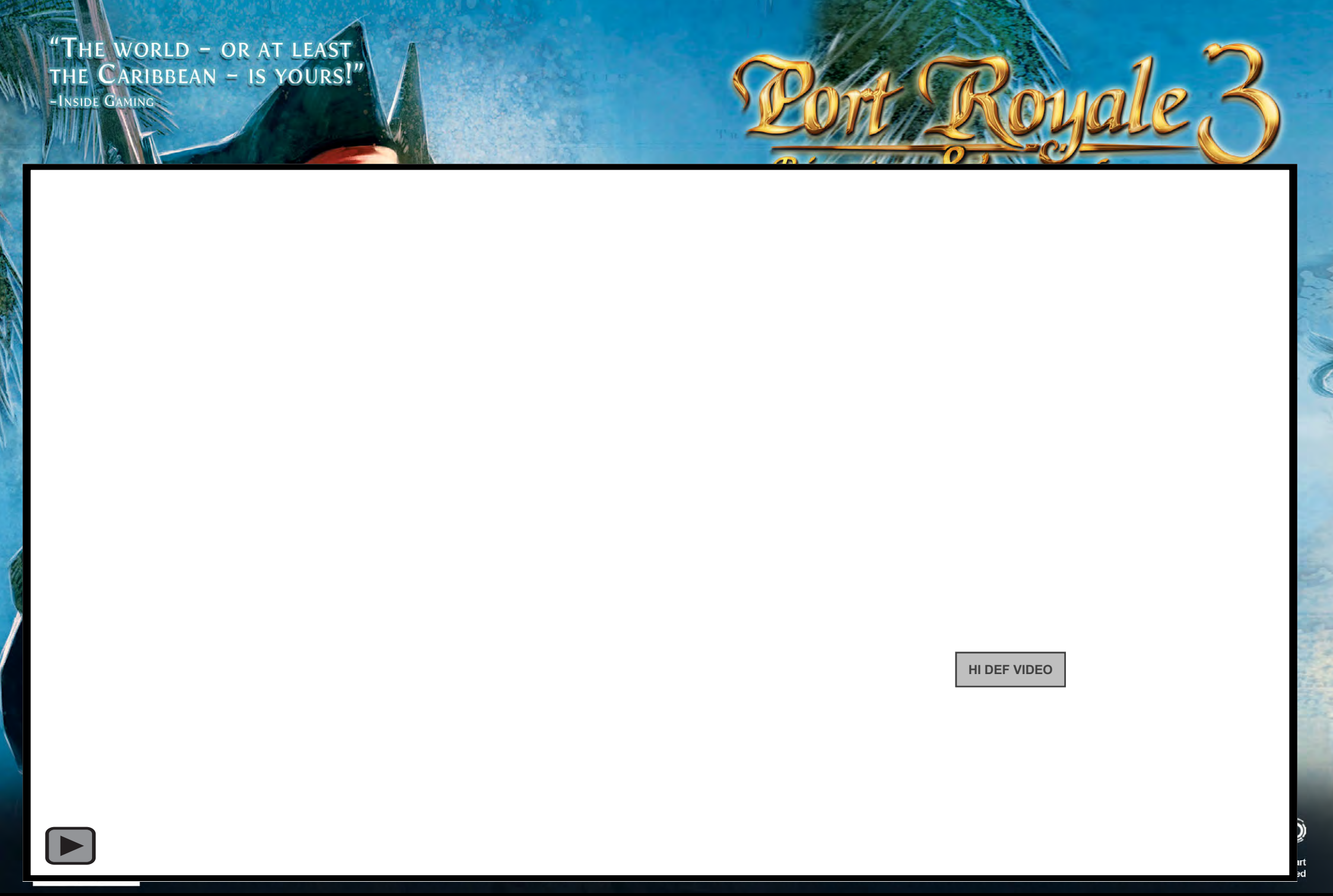
Interacting with anything is simply a case of clicking and choosing an option from a drop-down menu, but this is so that the gameplay is accessible.

Last year Tiny Speck took the brave decision to take *Glitch* offline and back into Beta in order to add more polish and content to their début game, and that effort is clear to see. The supporting web and mobile infrastructure is a prime example of that polish and the microtransactions seem fair, only offering vanity items to those willing to pay a little extra.

My overwhelming feeling about *Glitch* is one of surprise. I didn't expect a social experience to get its hooks into me this quickly or deeply, especially with all the crafting trappings, but after a week with the game I genuinely had a tough time stepping away to cover other games. That's a label very few MMOs can boast, especially browser ones, and is a testament to *Glitch*'s quality and character. It'll be very interesting to see how this delightfully absurd yet welcoming experience evolves in the future. ■

A MOBILE MMO

Unlike the vast majority of other tie-in mobile apps, *Glitch* actually allows players to do a fair bit with regards to social interaction and character progression. You can queue up more skills for your character to learn, check out what badges and achievements your friends have earned, read up new entries in the game's encyclopedia and check out screenshots either you or other players have uploaded to the Snap gallery. Frankly this app puts those expensive authenticator devices to shame.



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GHOST RECON ONLINE

ROLL OVER FOR INFO!

Kill and be killed in combat ripped from the not-too-distant future

PUB: UBISOFT
DEV: UBISOFT SINGAPORE
LAST GAME: N/A
ETA: OUT NOW
PRICE: FREE

The number of free-to-play shooters out there has absolutely exploded over the past 12 months. There's *Tribes*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Blacklight Retribution*, and *Bulletrun* to name more than a few, and now Ubisoft are throwing their hat into the increasingly crowded ring with *Ghost Recon Online*, an experience which places an emphasis on team-play, and equips players with a myriad of futuristic technology including stealth suits, shield projectors and other gizmos that wouldn't look out of place in the reboot of *Total Recall*.

The problem is that free-to-play shooters tend to feel as though they've been ripped out from an abandoned traditional game, and here that's exactly the case. All of these crazy powers and their uses are explained via in-game video tutorials narrated by developers, but it just seems a bit cheap and lazy. These tools aren't linked with the game's universe or any kind of story, instead they just plainly exist simply to give you and your team-mates more of an edge against similarly kitted-out foes, in a competitive environment optimised for 18 players. These toys are *GRO*'s main hook and to see them not placed in any kind of context other than a short blurb describing their function is just a bit strange.

The rest of the game is similarly light on any kind of context for the ensuing battle. Each map is introduced with a tiny description, explaining why Red want something and why Blue want to stop them but really this experience is aimed squarely at the competitive crowd.

In total there are five dreary concrete maps on offer, all of which are smaller than *Tribes*' yet bigger than *Blacklight*'s arenas, with game modes split between Conquest which requires two teams to fight over five different capture points on one map, and Onslaught which has one team attacking three capture points, while the other must defend. These lack of options may be to do with the fact that the game is still relatively new, but we suspect it's so that Ubisoft can keep the game polished and balanced.

Each of the three classes on offer – Specialist (heavy), Sniper and Assault – boast abilities which can help your team-

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Expect to hear some very touching tales of loss and self-sacrifice.

The Aegis shield not only looks cool, it can also make capturing points fairly straightforward.

mates in various ways, for instance scanning an area for foes and each class's strengths and weaknesses also prevent one extremely good player dominating a team – that is if they're working together. Each role works out exactly as you'd expect with the Specialist touting machine guns, Sniper boasting rifles, and Assault the versatile mix between the two. There are lots of different customisations for each piece of equipment and finding the right loadout is crucial. Swapping out different scopes and adding a laser sight to your rifle of choice is also well implemented and provides a good thrill.

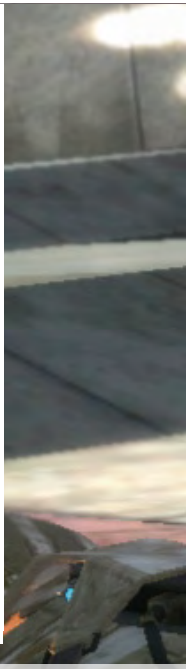
Aesthetically *GRO* is rather bland, but the UI and menu design effectively communicate the near-future setting. We especially like the HUD with its sweeping lines attaching themselves to team-mates whenever they're nearby and neat overlays whenever you set off support powers.

The core gunplay feels really impactful and the emphasis on cover, with players able to snap their character to any surface, gives rounds a very strategic feel. The matchmaking system is also fast and efficient, with matches usually hitting the competitive sweet spot before two teams of 18.

> *"The first time you realise you have to buy grenades is a bit of a shock"*

The cash store is also very flexible with players able to buy mostly anything, other than XP boosts, with Requisition Points which are earned merely by taking part in matches and meeting daily challenges. The first time you realise you have to buy grenades is a bit of a shock, but as new goodies are offered at every level, or when you complete individual challenges, that nasty taste is immediately washed away.

GRO isn't the perfect online shooter, it's certainly lacking in the juxtaposition department, but for a free-to-play game it's enjoyable and doesn't punish the player for not forking out cash. Fundamentally this is a polished multiplayer experience which is worth a punt if you're looking to exercise your cyber-loving trigger finger, but just don't expect it to do any more than that. ■



FINAL VERDICT

A component cover shooter which is lacking in exposition and gameplay choice

- ⊕ Customisation system allows plenty of scope for player expression
- ⊖ Only two different modes and five maps
- ⊖ No exposition for what is a very on the nose and intriguing setting

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STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA

This is the franchise bible you've been looking for...

PUB: DORLING KINDERSLEY
AUTHOR: VARIOUS
RRP: £30.00
ETA: OUT NOW

What's this, a book review in *MMOZine*? Are we trying to form a rival to the annual Man Booker Prize? Well, yes – wait no, no we're not! It's just that occasionally a PR agency asks if we want to look at game-related books and most of the time frankly we say no. Not because we think print is dead or anything like that, it's just that it's very hard to critically appraise any MMO-associated literary effort when most information is available via online wikis. We decided to take a look at *SWTOR*'s glossy encyclopedia, made by those talented technical artists at Dorling Kindersley, because we always loved their cutaway manuals detailing the insides of the Death Star, X-Wing or any other marvels from *Star Wars*, and we wanted to see how they'd deal with the latest spin-off.

The answer is exceedingly well, as this encyclopedia is the perfect companion to your adventures in BioWare's soon to be free-to-play MMORPG. The book is slightly wider than A4 and contains 352 high-quality pages detailing everything you need to know about the MMORPG including lore, class archetypes, character biographies, timelines and ship types. Key characters and their motivations are detailed with oodles of supporting art.

Spoilers are kept to a minimum, apart from the class overview pages, and each tasty fiction morsel has been penned by senior BioWare writers Ian Ryan, Charles Boyd, Hall Hood, Joanna Berry, Zach Bush and James B. Jones. We haven't heard of them, either but the information contained in this book is very detailed with nine different chapters focused on Republic, Jedi Order, Sith Empire, Sith, Madalorians, Underworld, Hutt Cartel, Species and Planets.

The font is large and easy to read with simple language making this hefty coffee table book fit for all ages. The price is a bit steep, but the build quality and the colourful pages won't make you feel shortchanged.

This encyclopedia doesn't contain anything you won't find in an online wiki, but if you fancy a quick reference guide or a flashy franchise bible to document this evolving universe, you can't really go wrong with this book. Expensive, but certainly worthwhile. ■

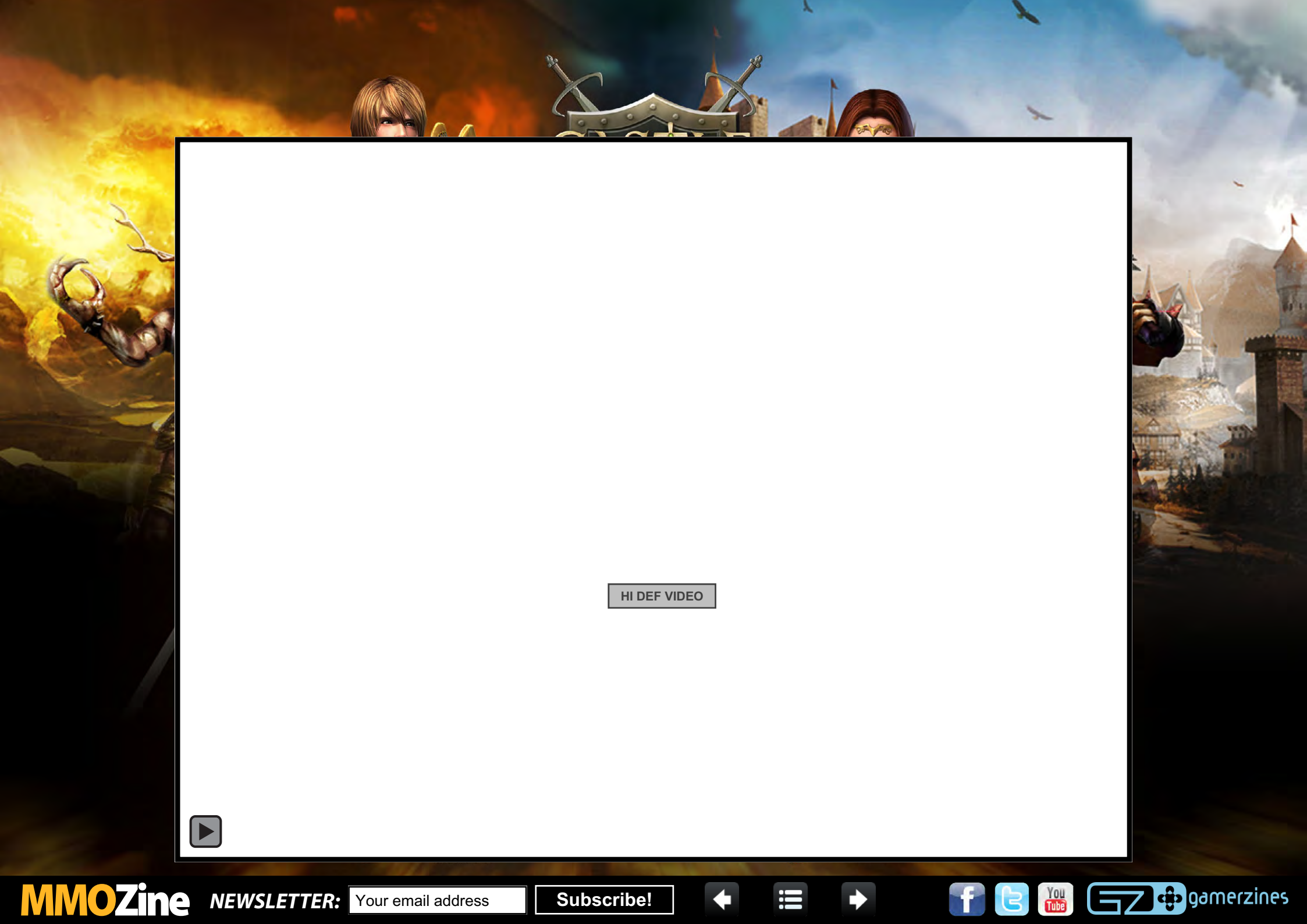
JEDI KNIGHT
The valiant Jedi Knights are the greatest defenders of peace and justice in the Galactic Republic. They are beacons of hope in dark times.
THE JEDI ORDER
FEW ENEMIES CAN MATCH the raw power of a trained Jedi Knight in combat. These brave champions of light spend their entire lives mastering the Force and testing themselves against all manner of challenges and opponents. By the time they are ready to pass their final trials to become Jedi Knights, young Jedi Padawans have already spent more time in battle than the average veteran soldier.
It is tempting to think of Jedi Knights as lone warriors standing firm against waves of enemies, but the way of the Jedi teaches cooperation and leadership. The most successful Knights are those who can rally others around them to battle as one.
"A Jedi Knight is a weapon, just like a lightsaber. One hopes it's never needed, but it's always at the ready just in case."
Master Orgus Din
JEDI SPECIES
All living beings, regardless of species, possess a connection to the Force. Jedi Knights feel this link more strongly than others. Some of the greatest Knights to ever serve the Republic include humans, Twi'leks, Zabrak, and Miralukans. The blind Miraluka species have also become valiant Jedi Knights, as they depend on the Force to see and interpret all around them.
TWI'LEK
HUMAN
MIRALUKA
THE PATH OF A JEDI
There are as many different types of Jedi as there are unique individuals in the galaxy. All Knights train to excel at combat, but each discovers a personal path to victory through deep meditation and an ever-strengthening bond with the Force.
Heavy battle armor frees the Knight to focus on offense
Jedi prefer lightsaber colors that evoke nature, such as blue, green, and yellow
Robes provide camouflage and can distract enemies

Just like the DK cutaway tech books, the layouts here are full of information used in the most interesting way possible, with art to back it up.

FINAL VERDICT

Fantastic visual and literary companion to an already lore-laden MMORPG

- ⊕ Fantastic build quality and inspired art selection
- ⊕ Detailed biographies from those who worked on *SWTOR*
- ⊖ Expensive compared to other franchise bibles



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